

Painted Wooden Plaques from the MacFarlane Collection: The Earliest Inuvialuit Graphic Art

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ABSTRACT. In the 1860s, fur trader Roderick MacFarlane amassed a large ethnographic and zoological collection from the western Canadian Arctic, mainly on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution. Among the many items collected are eight hand-sized wooden plaques bearing incised polychrome scenes of traditional Inuvialuit (Mackenzie Inuit) life. The earliest significant examples of Inuvialuit graphic art in existence, these pieces provide a unique perspective on Inuvialuit culture and history at a critical period: during the first generation of sustained European contact.

Key words: Mackenzie Inuit, Inuvialuit, Inuit art, Inuit history, Hudson's Bay Company, Smithsonian Institution, Roderick MacFarlane, Émile Petitot, Fort Anderson, fur trade

RÉSUMÉ. Dans les années 1860, Roderick MacFarlane, commerçant en fourrures, a recueilli une grande collection d'objets ethnographiques et zoologiques de l'ouest de l'Arctique canadien, surtout au nom du Smithsonian Institution. Parmi les nombreux articles qu'il a recueillis se trouvent huit plaques format de poche portant des gravures polychromes de scènes représentant la vie traditionnelle des Inuvialuits (les Inuits du Mackenzie). Ces œuvres représentent les premiers exemples importants d'art graphique des Inuvialuits et à ce titre, elles offrent une perspective unique sur la culture et l'histoire des Inuvialuits à une période critique : pendant la première génération de contact soutenu avec les Européens.

Mots clés : Inuits du Mackenzie, Inuvialuit, art inuit, histoire des Inuits, Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, Smithsonian Institution, Roderick MacFarlane, Émile Petitot, Fort Anderson, commerce des fourrures

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INTRODUCTION

The Inuvialuit—Inuit living in the western part of the Canadian Arctic (Fig. 1)—were among the first Inuit in Canada to be profoundly affected by European and Euro-American contact. In the early 1850s, they began trading with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) (McGhee, 1974), and by 1890, they were hosting the American Pacific whaling fleet at Herschel Island in the Beaufort Sea (Bockstoe, 1986). With this intimate contact came infectious diseases, principally measles, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis. By the 1870s, the population was already in rapid decline. "We are all dying," one Inuvialuk told missionary Émile Petitot (1999:181). The arrival of the whalers only steepened the descent. From an original population that probably exceeded 2000 people before the first epidemics in 1865, only 150 survived just two generations later (see Alunik et al., 2003, for a general history of the Inuvialuit).

Traditional Inuvialuit culture as it existed before about 1900 is now beyond living memory, nor was it well recorded by travellers and anthropologists of the day.

Most of what we know comes in the form of retrospective testimony gathered in the early 20th century by the explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1919), from the sometimes unsympathetic missionary Émile Petitot (1876, 1999; see also Savoie, 1970), who visited the Inuvialuit in the 1860s–70s, and from the records of various British naval expeditions that explored the western Arctic coast in the years between 1826 and the early 1850s (see Morrison, 2003a).

All of these accounts, of course, present Inuvialuit culture "from the outside in"—from the point of view of non-Inuvialuit. The Inuvialuit voice can be heard in a few accounts written by recent Inuvialuit elders, notably Bob Cockney (Nuligak, 1966), but only their very earliest childhood memories date back to the period in question (Cockney was born ca. 1895). This paper presents a unique window on traditional Inuvialuit culture and a unique opportunity to see that culture through Inuvialuit eyes. It concerns eight wooden plaques, possibly box parts, with engraved and painted scenes on one or both faces, collected as part of the MacFarlane collection at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Together these plaques represent the earliest surviving Inuvialuit graphic art of any significance.

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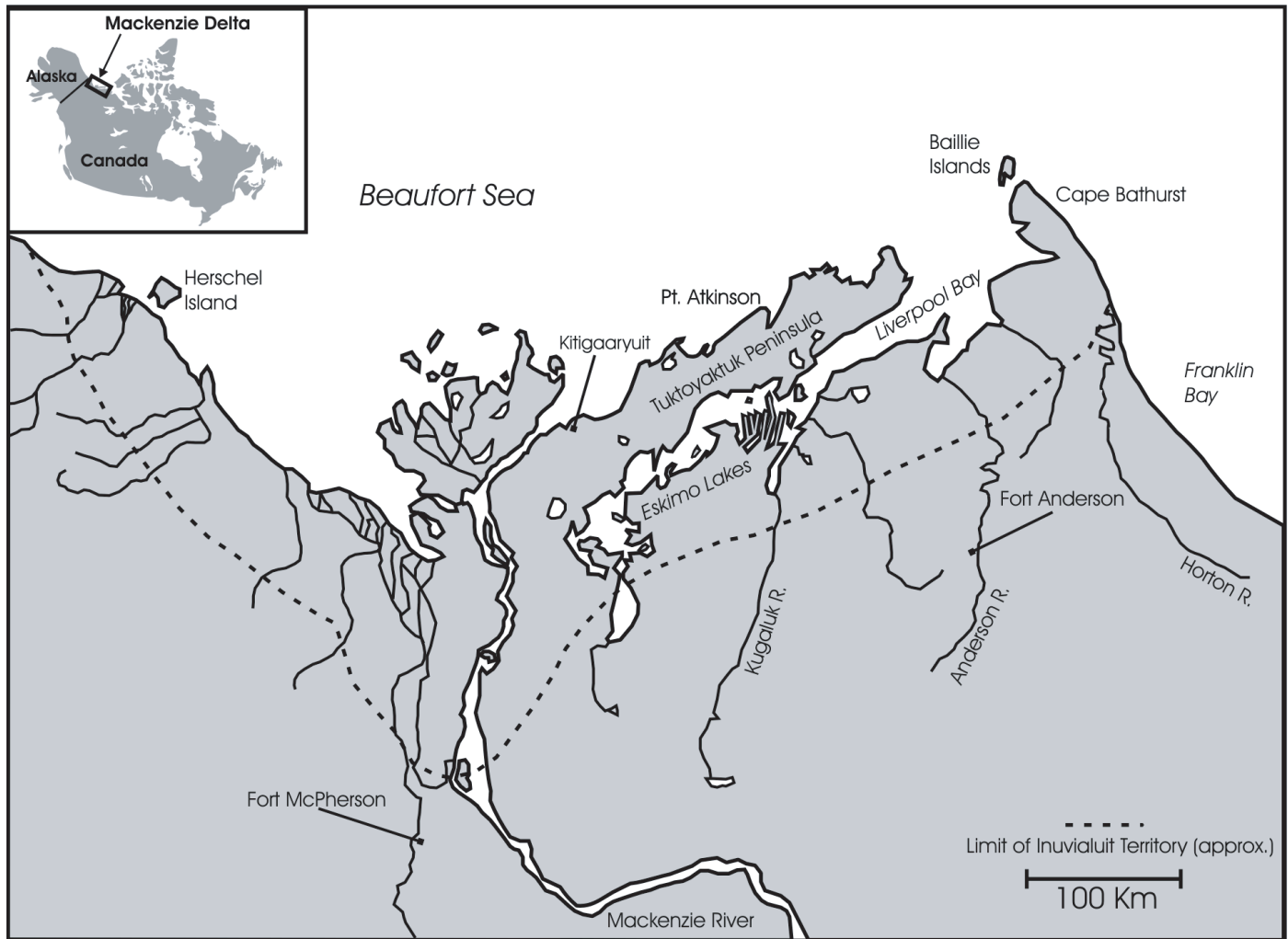


FIG. 1. The Western Canadian Arctic in the 1860s.

FORT ANDERSON AND THE MACFARLANE COLLECTION

Roderick MacFarlane was a Hudson's Bay Company employee, posted as a clerk to Fort Good Hope on the lower Mackenzie River in the mid-1850s. At the time, the Inuvialuit had just begun direct trade with the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort McPherson (Peel's River Post, as it was called) on the Peel River, which flows into the Mackenzie farther downstream. This trade seems to have encompassed only the Mackenzie River Inuvialuit; more easterly groups were said to "dread their turbulent countrymen" (Richardson, 1851:258) living around the mouth of the Mackenzie. Instead, they preferred to trade with the Hare or "Loucheux Bâtards," a Dene group who in turn were trading with the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Good Hope. MacFarlane was optimistic about cutting out the Hare Indian middlemen and trading directly with the eastern Inuvialuit. He wrote to his superiors, "There is reason to believe that when [the fur trade's] benefits are felt by these people, and they become in a manner dependent on the Whites for their wants, from their well known

industrious habits they would exert themselves in a far greater degree than the Indians, and there is also reason to believe that this trade would at no distant date embrace the whole Eastern Esquimaux indirectly through their Countrymen of Liverpool Bay" (HBC, B/200/b/31:66).

MacFarlane was charged with exploring the Anderson River in preparation for establishing a new post to serve the eastern Inuvialuit. In 1857, he canoed down the river with Indian guides from Fort Good Hope. Just south of the tree line they met Inuvialuit, to whom they offered gifts of tobacco. At first all went well, but soon these local Inuvialuit were joined by "Western Esquimaux" from the "vicinity of the Mackenzie River," who, MacFarlane believed, had travelled east with the sole intent of robbing him. MacFarlane and his party were threatened with violence—seven guns "held up to intimate to us that they were as well armed as ourselves"—pillaged, and forced to abandon their canoes. They walked out with little more than the clothes on their backs (MacFarlane, 1891:40).

After a second, more successful expedition two years later, MacFarlane built and opened Fort Anderson on the left bank of the middle Anderson River in 1861. Known

locally as “Esquimaux Fort,” it was the first HBC post in the Northwest aimed primarily at the Inuit/Inuvialuit trade. The fort was located in forested country south of traditional Inuvialuit territory, but within easy travelling distance of the coast. Unfortunately, the post was abandoned in 1866 because the overland supply route was too difficult, and revenues had declined after the region was ravaged by its first recorded disease epidemic, likely measles or scarlet fever (Stager, 1967; Morrison, 2003a).

As clerk in charge, MacFarlane devoted himself to more than the financial well-being of his employers. In February 1862, while visiting Fort Good Hope, he accidentally met Robert Kennicott, a northern traveller and adventurer and an agent of the Smithsonian Institution, the American national museum. Even though MacFarlane was a British subject operating in British North America, Kennicott recruited him as a “natural history” collector for the Smithsonian, and over the next few years, he amassed an immense collection numbering more than 5000 specimens. Most were zoological—stuffed animals, pelts, eggs, feathers, and so on—but many were ethnographic. MacFarlane was by far the most productive of Kennicott’s protégés, and his collecting activities were famous in his own lifetime. He donated some items to the Natural History Society in Montreal (now in the McCord Museum) and the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art (now in the National Museums of Scotland), but by far the bulk of his collection went to the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (Lindsay, 1993).

MacFarlane seems to have depended a great deal on the labour of local Inuvialuit and Hare in putting together his collection, which he bought and paid for from his private purse. He also made four overland trips to the Arctic Ocean in search of specimens. The Hudson’s Bay Company seems to have accepted his explanation that he was by no means neglecting his other, official duties in undertaking this work. Certainly he benefited from the freedom of his situation in so isolated a post, even though he was a mere clerk and not yet an officer of the company. MacFarlane was much honoured in his own lifetime as one of the best amateur collectors the Smithsonian had ever had. He was never paid for his work beyond the occasional gift, although some of his expenses were defrayed and he was sometimes provided with materials, such as preservatives (Lindsay, 1993).

During the late winter of 1865, MacFarlane was visited at Fort Anderson by Émile Petitot, a Roman Catholic missionary. MacFarlane paid a local “chief” (Noulloumallok-Innonarana, known to the whites as “Powderhorn”) to convey Petitot on to the coast, where he hoped to preach. But after various adventures, Petitot too was turned aside and pillaged, as MacFarlane himself had been eight years before.

Petitot provides our only written description of Fort Anderson during its brief existence (Petitot, 1999:7–9) beyond the terse register of the Hudson’s Bay Company

(see Stager, 1967). The fort was a square palisade built of timber. Roughly 50 m to a side, it was flanked at each corner by towers 6 m high. A raised gallery that ran along the inside wall enabled defenders to shoot down upon any assailants in case of an attack by “the fierce Eskimos.” The main gate passed through a square blockhouse, above which floated the Union Jack. Inside the palisade were three buildings made from squared logs. Here lived MacFarlane and his Scottish or Dene company servants, alongside a warehouse for furs and provisions.

The relationship between MacFarlane and Petitot was a remarkably friendly one, considering the usual antipathy between French Catholic missionaries and Presbyterian fur traders. Petitot is full of praise for MacFarlane in his published account, calling him a “kind gentleman” and praising his “delicate and lofty sentiments” (Petitot, 1999:11) in assisting Petitot in his goal. The fact that Petitot was a visitor to Fort Anderson at about the time the plaques and the other ethnographic items were collected makes him a valuable witness to the general social situation. He may even be depicted on one of the plaques.

MacFarlane’s ethnographic collection at the Smithsonian, consisting of over 550 catalogued specimens, is one of the earliest and largest Inuit collections from anywhere in Canada. It is also the only significant Inuvialuit collection anywhere that dates from before about 1900. References to it exist, of course, in the standard Inuit ethnographic literature: Murdoch (1892), for instance, made good comparative use of it. But the MacFarlane collection has never been comprehensively published or described in print, nor has it been much exhibited. The largest sample to appear before the public was a group of 26 artifacts borrowed as part of the exhibition “Across Time and Tundra: the Inuvialuit of the Canadian Arctic,” on display at the Canadian Museum of Civilization from November 2003 to February 2005. I was the curator of that exhibition, and it was while researching collections at the Smithsonian that I discovered the eight decorated wooden pieces described here.

We know little about how the collection was amassed. MacFarlane purchased items and shipped them south on a more or less annual basis. As Lindsay (1993) has noted, judging by the accession dates, most of the ethnographic items were collected in the last year or two of Fort Anderson’s existence (1865 or 1866), at a time when few zoological specimens were being collected. It may be that the measles or scarlet fever epidemic of 1865–66 provided some of the motivation, as desperate Inuvialuit traded their tools and clothing for money or credit to buy provisions from the company store. Moreover, many items in the collection were evidently commissioned, or at least made with the goal of selling them in mind. Included are over a dozen model sleds and boats. These would have been of no use to the Inuvialuit, but for MacFarlane’s purposes could substitute for objects too large or bulky to transport south by canoe and York boat. Judging by their stereotypical subject matter, some of the painted plaques

were probably intended for a European or American audience.

When Fort Anderson closed in 1866, MacFarlane was posted back to Fort Good Hope. He eventually achieved the position of Chief Factor before retiring in 1894 (MacFarlane, 1905). He died about 15 years later.

THE PAINTED PLAQUES

The eight painted plaques in the MacFarlane collection were all accessioned in Washington under the same catalogue number (E002545) and in the same year: 1867. Like most other ethnographic items in the collection, they were presumably collected in 1865 or 1866, during the last year or so of Fort Anderson's existence. Each measures about 9×15 cm (3.5×6 inches), is about 4 mm thick (about a quarter inch), and appears to be made of spruce. Most have several drilled or gouged holes along one or more sides, suggesting that they may have originally been intended as the component pieces of pegged or lashed-together rectangular wooden boxes. If so, however, either they were unfinished, or they represent a more perfunctory style of joinery than that illustrated by the complete, finished wooden boxes in the MacFarlane collection (cf. Nelson, 1983: Pl. XLII).

The painted scenes were first incised into the soft wood using the point of a knife or engraving tool. The figures were then coloured in, using two shades of pigment: black or dark blue-grey and a reddish tan. A third colour is achieved through the use of negative space, either by not painting or by scraping away the existing paint within an incised figure set against a dark painted background. The two active colours were likely produced by mixing oil with charcoal (to make the dark blue-grey) or ochre (to make the reddish tan; see Petitot, 1999:49). Together the eight plaques depict 15 scenes, all but one being painted on both sides. These incised and painted scenes can be loosely grouped into several themes.

Hunting, Fishing, and Travelling Scenes

Figure 2 depicts a caribou hunt. A man in a typical horn-prowed Inuvialuit kayak (cf. Morrison, 2003b:31) lances a swimming caribou; a trickle of blood is seen coming from the animal's mouth or nostrils. Another caribou swims just ahead, sharing the same horizontal waterline. Behind is a second man in a kayak. Ambushes like this at water crossings were a common caribou-hunting tactic across the Arctic. MacFarlane (1905:681) describes how "the Anderson and Liverpool Bay Eskimos" engaged in hunting caribou along the Anderson River, particularly during the autumn, "when the Eskimos shot and speared a great number...[that were] in the water making for their customary crossing points or passes." The plaque might have been painted to illustrate just such a description.

Figure 3 shows a beluga hunt. Three men in kayaks form a line pursuing, or driving, a pod of seven small white whales. One of the men is holding a lance or harpoon as well as his paddle. Petitot (1876:xx) records that beluga were sometimes hunted around the mouth of the Anderson River, but the Mackenzie estuary was a far more important location for this type of hunt. Later observers described the traditional strategy used there: a long line of kayakers would drive a pod of beluga before them into shallow water, in an attempt to beach the whales. Once run aground, the animals were easily dispatched (Nuligak, 1966; Krech, 1989; cf. Morrison, 1989). This kind of communal, kayak-based beluga hunt seems to be what is depicted here.

The bowhead whale hunt is the subject of the next painted scene (Fig. 4). It centres on an *umiaq*, or large skin boat. Three rowers can be seen in profile, along with a sternsman and, in the bow, the harpooner. He is standing with his large harpoon in hand, ready to strike. The whale itself is partially out of the frame, and is drawn quite small in relation to the *umiaq*. The only eyewitness description of an Inuvialuit whale hunt to survive (M'Clure, 1969:93) indicates that the rowers at least sometimes included women; there would have been six or eight rowers in a typical *umiaq*. From later sources, we know that the sternsman was normally the captain and owner of the boat, the *umialik* (Stefansson, 1919). According to MacFarlane (1905:730), "The Eskimos who frequented Fort Anderson succeeded in most seasons in killing one large whale, but seldom as many as two. Plenty reigned for many months as a result."

Ice fishing, or "jigging" as it is called in the western Arctic, is depicted in the next scene (Fig. 5). A man is shown sitting on a stool on the surface of the ice, indicated by a horizontal line. In his hand is the kind of curved or pistol-gripped jigging rod still used by Inuvialuit. From it descends a hooked line, around which, below the surface of the ice, is gathered a group of five fish. Each is drawn differently, as if to indicate different species, probably including grayling (with the large dorsal fin), burbot (top left?), and lake trout (bottom right?), all of which are species able to take a hook. Oddly, two and possibly three of the fish are depicted with spurred lines projecting from their heads, suggestive of antlers. MacFarlane collected fishing gear just like that illustrated, including the wooden stool.

A bird hunt is shown in another scene (Fig. 6). This plaque is stylistically quite different from the others, with a painted blue-black background, against which the foreground figures have been scratched away, revealing the underlying wood. Two large trees are depicted. In one sits a bird with a long drooping tail (left); below it is a hooded hunter taking aim with bow and arrow. Another bird seems to be falling to earth. On the lowest branch of the second (right-hand) tree stands a second hooded figure with a stick in his hand. It is difficult to identify the birds; they are not waterfowl, but may be cranes. If so, this scene may



FIG. 2. A caribou hunting scene.

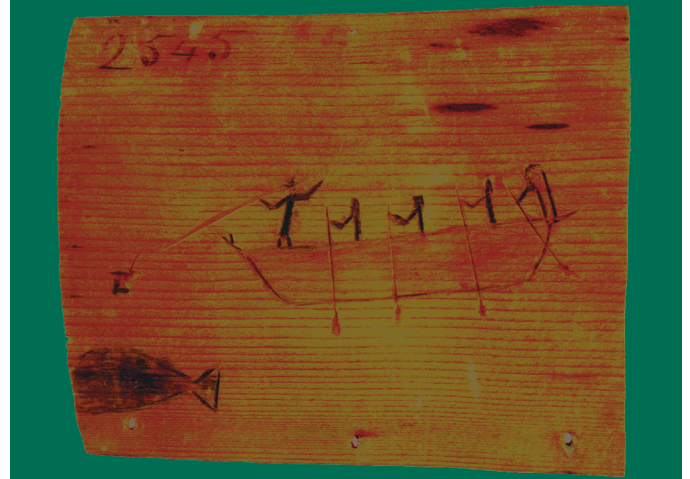


FIG. 4. Bowhead whale hunting.



FIG. 3. A beluga hunt.



FIG. 5. A man ice fishing while his dog looks on.

record one of MacFarlane's zoological collecting expeditions, since cranes were of little economic value to the Inuvialuit, but of considerable interest to the natural historian. The large trees suggest that the scene may depict the immediate area of Fort Anderson.

A sledding scene records some of the hardships of traditional life (Fig. 7). It shows two sleds, one much longer than the other, both with railed sides (cf. Savoie, 1970: Fig. 31). Each is pulled by a single human figure with a chest harness. There is also a single, tiny dog hitched to the smaller sled. Before the 20th century, as this picture reminds us, Inuvialuit dog teams were often small, and winter transportation sometimes required considerable human effort. Above the smaller sled, a large bird, with wings spread, is shown suspended from the end of a pole. This bird provides a link with the narrative of Petitot, who also draws stuffed or preserved birds, apparently eagles, adorning the inside of an Inuvialuit house (Petitot, 1999:30) and an *umiak* (Savoie, 1970: Fig. 19). The birds seem to have functioned as amulets ("fetishes" or "animal totems" in Petitot's account): "That day every umiak was

decorated by the skin of some beast or that of some bird spread on little sticks like the paper on a kite, fluttering from a pole.... Inontakrark, my host, had an eagle as his fetish" (Petitot, 1999:116).

Depictions of Europeans and European Dwellings

The scene shown in Figure 8 is inscribed within a frame, perhaps representing a room. Three bearded Europeans sit around a table, each on a four-legged chair or stool. Their arms are spread, as if in prayer, and there are objects on the table. They may be bowls, and it is possible that the scene we are witnessing is the saying of grace before a meal. The men are dressed in shirts and trousers, quite different from the hooded coats worn by Inuvialuit in other pictures. The man in the middle, dressed entirely in black, may possibly be identified as Émile Petitot himself, dressed in his priestly garb. While visiting the Inuvialuit, Petitot describes his black clothing on several occasions (e.g., Petitot, 1999:29). One of the other men is presumably Roderick MacFarlane.



FIG. 6. Bird hunting.



FIG. 7. Sledding scene.

Figure 9 shows two figures—a man and a woman—again inscribed within a frame. The man is bearded and smokes a pipe, and he is dressed in European fashion, with dark trousers, a red shirt, and a wide belt. He is sitting at a kind of combination table and stool. In one hand he holds some kind of tool; his other hand rests on the woman's hip. She is standing before him, one hand reaching out as if to touch his face. She is dressed in a long striped dress, with trousers or bloomers beneath, and her hair is tied back in a bun. She seems to have Aboriginal features, and indeed it seems certain that no European woman ever visited Fort Anderson (see Petitot, 1999:7). On the table are various domestic items (a bottle and several other containers). A bucket is suspended above them, and a small dog sits under the table. From what we know of social relations at the time, the woman is more likely to have been Hare or Gwich'in than Inuvialuit. "Country marriages" like that depicted in this domestic scene were common in the Northwest at the time, but as yet (1865–66) rarely seem to have involved Inuvialuit women. A colleague of Mr. MacFarlane, C.P. Gaudet, was in fact the object of consid-



FIG. 8. Three white men.

erable Inuvialuit anger, because he "(took) away a girl of the tribe [Inuvialuit] who had later become the wife of an Orkney man" (Petitot, 1999:55). Gaudet was based at Fort McPherson, but he visited Fort Anderson during Petitot's visit (see Petitot, 1999:54).

In the next drawing (Fig. 10), two people are lying abed in what appear to be bunks. They are shown within a building with an A-frame roof, a chimney, and a stove. A loop-handled pot rests on or in the stove. A cutaway technique has been employed so that one can see through the walls and into the building. The beardless face and the shape of the hip indicate that the upper figure may be a woman.

Depictions of Inuvialuit Villages/Dwellings

Figure 11 shows two Inuvialuit men standing before a small village, consisting of a conical tent and a more rounded dwelling, possible a winter sod house (*igluyaryuk*). There is the suggestion of a second conical tent in the rear, and above the house is an A-shaped storage rack, surmounted by a pole from which three fox pelts hang to dry in the wind. Each man has a large knife in hand, and they seem to be fighting. They are dressed in hooded coats, with a feather or small animal skin attached to the back of the hood. These animal parts functioned as amulets or talismans, as described by Petitot (1999:10).

The second village scene (Fig. 12) is similar. It depicts two men standing before a village of four snowhouses (the snow blocks are clearly marked). Above the houses are three poles, from which fox pelts are suspended. As in the previous drawing, both red and cross fox pelts are indicated by the colouration. The two men are clearly fighting with knives. Each wears a dark hooded coat. The fox pelts underscore the importance of the fur trade even at this early date. They echo a description of Petitot (1999:52): "Above the top of the house the lustrous skin of the black fox trapped the day before waved in the breeze from the sea—it waved from the pole on which it was suspended."



FIG. 9. European man and aboriginal woman.



FIG. 11. Two men fighting.



FIG. 10. A European building (two people lying abed).



FIG. 12. Snowhouses and men fighting.

The third village scene (Fig. 13) depicts a cutaway of a snowhouse, seen as a simple incised arch. Within, a couple is having sex on the floor. Both are still wearing their hooded coats; the man is above in what has been called the “missionary position.” On the arch of the snowhouse, apparently looking down the ventilation hole, is a third figure, a “peeping tom,” perhaps a jealous suitor or husband. In one hand he holds some object, probably a knife with a bifurcate handle (such knives were used by both Dene and Inuvialuit: see Petitot, 1999: front cover). A dog adds to the dramatic, and apparently humorous, tension of the piece; he crouches just outside the door, tail raised in excitement.

Animals, Real and Fantastic

A polar bear is shown in profile in Figure 14. The animal is simply and accurately rendered against a dark background, enclosed within an incised frame.

Figure 15 shows a fantastic creature, drawn against a dark background. It takes the basic form of a dog, and is

parti-coloured, with white patches on the back and white throat, legs, and belly. The tail too is dog-like, except that it does not curl forward over the back (it might thus be better considered as wolf-like). The feet, however, are those of a bird. The animal also appears to have a beak rather than a muzzle, and it sports antlers like those seen on the fish in the ice-fishing scene (Fig. 5). The beak is held by a man shown in profile, only half of whom is visible. He wears a reddish shirt or jacket and calf-length boots and has a beardless, apparently aboriginal face. The most obvious explanation for this drawing is that it depicts a shaman and his guardian spirit.

The final plaque depicts a bird (Fig. 16). It may be a crane, like those in the bird-hunting scene, but like the fantastic dog, it has antlers. It is shown in profile, facing a small cryptic figure loosely resembling a boat, which is broadly U-shaped with five vertical lines within and a large, lenticular appendage at one end. Both figures are framed within an incised square. It is difficult to interpret this drawing; it may represent a traditional story or some well-known mythological icon.



FIG. 13. Privacy in a snowhouse.



FIG. 15. Fantastic dog/guardian spirit.



FIG. 14. Polar bear.



FIG. 16. A fantastic bird.

DISCUSSION

There are few works to which the MacFarlane plaques can be usefully compared. Pre-contact Inuvialuit archaeological items, such as antler combs or knife handles, are occasionally decorated with perfunctory incised illustrations, but they are never painted, and none compare with these in the complexity of the treatment or the subject matter. Modern Inuvialuit graphic art of course does, but it is constructed in so vastly different a socioeconomic milieu that there seems little point in comparison. One point of contact, however, may be that both were (or are) produced for an essentially non-Inuvialuit market.

Neither are there close parallels to these works from elsewhere in the North American Arctic. Nineteenth-century North Alaskan Inupiat art is typically incised in walrus ivory. Pre-contact and early contact period pieces exemplify what Dorothy Jean Ray (1977:25) calls the "Old Engraving style." It typically decorated ivory pipes and bow-drill handles and is characterized by a repetition of forms, a highly linear orientation, an absence of back-

ground, and a lack of detail, so that human figures, for instance, are represented as stick men. The Old Engraving style, in fact, is essentially similar to archaeological Inuvialuit art, except that it tends to be more elaborate; it shows no particular similarities with MacFarlane's painted plaques. In the later nineteenth century, a new style emerged, stimulated by the opportunities of commercial sale. Designated the "Modified Engraving style" by Ray (1977:27), it is again confined to ivory engraving. However it does exhibit some points of overlap with these Inuvialuit pieces, in that it is less abstract or schematic in execution and larger in scale than the earlier style, with more rounded human figures and some indications of clothing style and ethnicity (Sami reindeer herders, Euro-Americans, and Inupiat are clearly distinguished). No particular historical relationship is seen with the Inuvialuit painted pieces, but both may share a conscious desire on the part of the artist to depict his or her culture and environment to a foreign, commercial audience. In the Eastern Arctic, a similar evolution towards more narrative, representational art can be seen in 19th-century

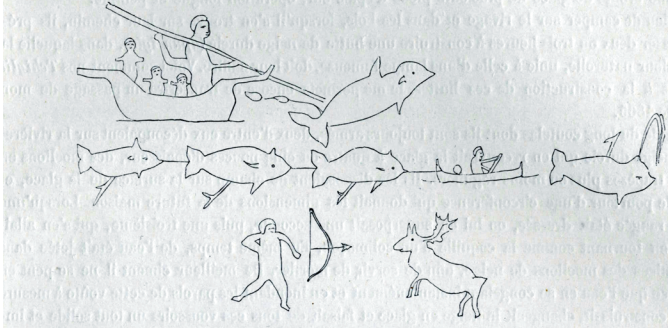


FIG. 17. Noulloumallok-Innonarana's drawing (from Petitot, 1876).

Aivilingmiut drawings produced for whaling master George Comer (Carpenter, 1997), for instance, or in the famous watercolours and woodcuts of Aron of Kangek, in Greenland (Knuth, 1960).

From the same time and place, perhaps the closest comparison is with a single work collected by Petitot in 1865. It was produced by his travelling companion and host, Noulloumallok-Innonarana, and Petitot briefly describes how it was made, "Taking from the shelf a round covered box... he [Noulloumallok-Innonarana] made drawings on it with ochre and carbon mixed with oil. He depicted a scene of the caribou hunt and one of a whale hunt and gave me the box" (Petitot, 1999:49).

The drawings, which he illustrates elsewhere (Petitot, 1876:XVIII), depict a whale hunt from an *umiak*, a man in a kayak towing home a string of beluga whales, and an archer with a caribou (Fig. 17). The published version is a black-and-white rendering of a coloured original, so some of its dramatic impact has been lost. Nonetheless, it is clearly a much cruder, less pleasing work than the MacFarlane plaques, without the crisp details and fine sense of action exhibited by some of the better MacFarlane plaques. It is similar, however, in terms of thematic content.

Taken together, the MacFarlane plaques provide a unique and surprisingly comprehensive overview of Inuvialuit life in the 1860s. Traditional hunting and fishing techniques are depicted, focusing on some of the most dramatic: a beluga drive, a bowhead whale hunt, ice fishing, a caribou hunt at a water crossing, and a sledging scene. They are so representative that they might almost have been chosen to illustrate an ethnographic text.

There are also depictions of social situations. Violence, real or threatened, is apparent in several scenes, in keeping with the Inuvialuit reputation in the 19th century as a pugnacious and warlike people (see Morrison, 2003a). In European drawings and photographs from the period, Inuvialuit men are almost always depicted with a knife in hand, and they were said to carry a knife at all times in public, social situations (Stefansson, in Palsson, 2001:227). The MacFarlane plaques support this reputation and suggest that the Inuvialuit may also have seen themselves as warlike and pugnacious. In the words of Nuligak, "In the olden days the Inuit slew those who killed their kinsmen. One vengeance followed another like links in a chain"

(Nuligak, 1966:203). We can only speculate whether the two knife fights and the armed peeping-tom scene refer to real and perhaps well-known events, or are generic representations.

The depictions of Europeans seem straightforward and accurate. European clothing styles are accurately rendered, and distinctive physical features are portrayed without obvious caricature. The function and structure of buildings and furniture also seem well grasped and depicted. The domestic scene with a European man and a Dene (?) woman seems to capture real affection between the two, and it is striking how little overt animosity toward whites is communicated, given Petitot's description of a generally tense social situation (see, for instance, Petitot, 1999:11–12). Of course, the plaques were probably produced with European sale in mind. The buildings and general setting of the European pictures must be those of Fort Anderson, the location where the plaques were collected and the only European post that most Anderson River Inuvialuit would have visited. As such, they represent the only graphic representation of the Fort to survive, beyond a sketch of the outside walls by Émile Petitot (see Savoie, 1970: Fig. 16).

Only a few plaques are difficult to "read," and all seem to have a spiritual or religious element. One puzzling detail is the antlers seen on the large bird, the fantastic dog, and several fish. Modern elders were questioned about these antlers, but no one had a suggestion to offer beyond the possibility that they may indicate the animal's spirit, or perhaps represent a spirit animal. Like other Inuit, the Inuvialuit lived in a universe populated by powerful and often dangerous spiritual forces (Morrison, 2003b).

We do not know if the MacFarlane plaques were the work of one artist or several. But he, she, or they left behind a body of work that is vigorous, aesthetically pleasing, and at the same time highly informative about a culture and way of life that have now utterly disappeared. In the drying fox skins and the growing intimacy with Europeans and their domestic arrangements that some of the plaques illustrate, we can already glimpse the seeds of the coming cataclysm. Within a year or two, Fort Anderson was abandoned. Within less than a century, not a single human being still lived on the banks of the Anderson River.

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